

## **THE PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGY IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION UNITS BASED ON DISCIPLINE AND CHARACTER AT SDN LHOK RUKAM, TAPAKTUAN, ACEH SELATAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Improving the quality of education is a top priority in managing educational institutions, particularly at the elementary school level. This study focuses on the strategies employed by the principal of SDN Lhok Rukam, Tapaktuan, Aceh Selatan, to enhance education quality through the integration of discipline and character values. A qualitative case study approach was utilized, with data collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the principal plays a central role in planning and implementing discipline- and character-based strategies. These strategies include establishing internal school policies, organizing teacher training programs to enhance pedagogical competence, and engaging parents in the educational process. The integration of discipline and character values is embedded in teaching and learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom. This integration has had a positive impact on various aspects, including increased student engagement in learning, the development of a positive school culture, and improvements in both academic and non-academic achievements. Moreover, it fosters strong character traits in students, such as responsibility, teamwork, and respect for others. However, the study also identifies challenges in implementing these strategies, including limited resources, insufficient active participation from some parents, and resistance to change among certain teachers. To address these challenges, the principal adopts a collaborative approach and provides recognition to stakeholders who support the initiatives.

**Keywords:** *principal's strategy, discipline, character education, education quality.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Improving the quality of education is one of the primary priorities in school management in Indonesia. Schools, as formal educational institutions, play a strategic role in shaping the next generation to excel academically and possess strong, resilient, and integrative character. In this regard, the role of the school principal as an educational leader is crucial, as they are responsible for formulating and implementing various strategies to ensure the achievement of educational goals. As stated by Wahjosumidjo (2013), the leadership of the school principal is a key factor in creating a conducive, productive, and potential-oriented learning environment.

One of the approaches gaining significant attention is the improvement of education quality based on discipline and character. Discipline serves as a foundational pillar in establishing effective school governance and promoting a productive learning culture. According to Sugiyanto (2010), discipline in educational institutions not only maintains order but also instills values of responsibility, independence, and commitment in students. Meanwhile, character education plays a vital role in fostering morality, integrity, and ethics in students to equip them to face future challenges. This concept aligns with Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the importance of developing students' potential to become individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character.

In the context of SDN Lhok Rukam, Tapaktuan District, South Aceh Regency, efforts to improve education quality through discipline and character-based approaches have become a primary focus. The school principal at SDN Lhok Rukam recognizes that consistent application of discipline and the strengthening of students' character can serve as the main pillars in creating quality education. The strategies implemented encompass various aspects, such as the formulation of a vision and mission oriented toward character building, the management of professional teaching staff, and the strengthening of a school culture based on local wisdom. This approach aims to create a school environment that supports not only academic achievement but also the development of individuals with noble character.

As leaders, school principals are expected to act as agents of change and transformational leaders who inspire all school components to work collaboratively toward achieving holistic educational goals. Bass (1990) asserts that transformational leaders are capable of motivating, empowering, and mobilizing their teams to realize a shared vision. In this case, the school principal at SDN Lhok Rukam is required to effectively fulfill their role as a manager, innovator, and mentor.

This study focuses on the strategies employed by school principals to enhance education quality through discipline and character-based approaches. Additionally, it aims to provide practical insights into strategic steps that can be adopted by other schools, particularly in South Aceh, as part of the effort to establish quality and character-driven educational institutions. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to contribute meaningfully to the development of education in Indonesia, particularly in the context of character building for the nation's future.

## **METHODS**

### **1. Research Approach**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of exploring and gaining an in-depth understanding of the school principal's strategies in improving the quality of education based on discipline and character at SDN Lhok Rukam, Tapaktuan Aceh Selatan. A qualitative approach is chosen because of its flexible nature and ability to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena occurring in the field, while also allowing the researcher to gather data through direct interactions with the research subjects.

### **2. Research Design**

The research design employed is a case study, with the primary focus on analyzing the educational unit, SDN Lhok Rukam. A case study approach allows the researcher to explore and describe the phenomena in detail and contextually within a specific location or community. This research also aims to understand how internal and external factors influence the implementation of the principal's strategies in improving the quality of education.

### **3. Research Subjects**

The research subjects are individuals directly involved in the educational process at SDN Lhok Rukam, including:

Principal: As the leader responsible for designing and implementing strategies to improve education quality based on discipline and character.

Teachers: As the implementers of the strategies carried out by the principal in teaching discipline and reinforcing character among the students.

Students: As the primary recipients of the strategies implemented, whose behavior reflects the impact of the reinforcement of discipline and character.

Parents: As partners in supporting the successful implementation of character education and discipline both at home and in school.

### **4. Data Collection Techniques**

Several techniques will be used to collect relevant data for this research:

In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the principal, teachers, students, and parents. The purpose of these interviews is to explore their views, experiences, and perceptions regarding the strategies implemented to improve the quality of education based on discipline and character.

**Participant Observation:** The researcher will conduct direct observations at SDN Lhok Rukam, observing the interactions between the principal, teachers, students, and parents, as well as activities related to character education and discipline.

**Documentation:** Relevant documents will be collected, such as the principal's program plans, student performance reports, and other supporting evidence of the educational management process at the school.

#### 5. Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, specifically an interactive model consisting of three main stages:

**Data Reduction:** This process involves filtering and organizing the data so that the relevant data aligned with the research focus can be selected and sorted. Irrelevant data will be excluded.

**Data Display:** After data reduction, the next step is to present the data in a form that is easily understood, either in narrative form or diagrams.

**Conclusion Drawing:** Based on the presented data, the researcher will draw conclusions regarding the principal's strategies in improving education quality based on discipline and character. The conclusions will also address the influence of internal and external factors that support or hinder the implementation of these strategies.

#### 6. Data Validity

To ensure the validity of the data in this study, the following steps will be taken:

**Triangulation:** Source triangulation will be used by comparing the results of interviews from various parties (principal, teachers, students, and parents) to ensure consistency in the information.

**Member Checking:** The researcher will return to the informants to verify the findings that have been analyzed to ensure that the findings obtained match their understanding.

**Audit Trail:** Clear documentation of procedures and decisions made at each stage of the research will be maintained to facilitate verification and ensure the validity of the data.

#### 7. Time and Place of Research

This research will be conducted at SDN Lhok Rukam, Tapaktuan, Aceh Selatan, over a period of 3 months. The researcher will collect data through interviews, observations, and data analysis at the school during this period.

#### 8. Research Ethics

It is important to maintain ethical standards in this research. Therefore, several measures will be taken:

**Informed Consent:** The researcher will obtain permission and consent from all research subjects before conducting interviews and observations.

**Confidentiality:** All data obtained will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research.

No Data Fabrication or Manipulation: The researcher is committed to presenting the data objectively and not manipulating the results of the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Results*

#### 1. Strategies for Implementing Discipline-Based Education

The principal at SDN Lhok Rukam has implemented various strategies to enhance discipline among students and teachers. These include:

- a. **Daily Discipline Monitoring:** The school establishes a structured routine where students are required to arrive on time, participate in morning assemblies, and follow rules consistently. Teachers serve as role models by adhering to the same standards of punctuality and responsibility.
- b. **Reward and Punishment System:** To encourage discipline, the school adopts a system of rewards for compliant behavior and constructive penalties for rule violations. According to Sugiyanto (2010), such systems effectively instill a sense of responsibility and accountability in students.
- c. **Parental Involvement:** The school actively involves parents in promoting discipline by conducting regular meetings and sharing progress reports. This aligns with Epstein's (2011) theory of family-school partnerships, which emphasizes the importance of parental engagement in fostering student discipline.

#### 2. Character Education Development

Character education at SDN Lhok Rukam is integrated into the curriculum and extracurricular activities. Key initiatives include:

- a. **Integration into Learning Activities:** Teachers incorporate character-building elements, such as teamwork, honesty, and respect, into classroom lessons. Lickona (1991) stresses that character education should be woven into the fabric of the school's instructional framework.
- b. **Cultural and Religious Programs:** Programs like regular Islamic studies, local cultural events, and community service activities are designed to instill moral values and cultural awareness in students. These activities reflect the principles of holistic education that emphasize the development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Nucci & Narvaez, 2014).
- c. **Role Modeling:** Teachers and school leaders actively demonstrate good character traits to provide students with tangible examples of ethical behavior. Bandura (1986) highlights the role of observational learning in shaping individual behavior, underscoring the importance of role models in education.

#### 3. Challenges in Implementing Strategies

Despite the progress, several challenges were identified, such as:

- a. Resistance from a small subset of students and parents to adapt to discipline policies.
- b. Limited resources to fully support extracurricular programs aimed at character development.
- c. Variability in teacher commitment to consistently implement character education principles.

### *Discussion*

#### 1. Leadership Role in Promoting Discipline and Character Education

The principal's leadership has proven crucial in driving these initiatives (Fitriyani et al., 2024). Transformational leadership principles, as described by Bass (1990) (Rohani et al., 2024), are evident in the principal's ability to inspire, motivate, and guide both teachers and students toward a shared vision of quality education (Afriani, 2024). The emphasis on discipline aligns with the concept of organizational culture, where consistent routines and shared values contribute to the school's overall effectiveness (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

#### 2. Importance of a Holistic Approach

The integration of character education into both curricular and extracurricular activities demonstrates the importance of a holistic approach (Journal et al., 2024). Lickona (1991) argues that effective character education requires collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community, which is evident in the strategies implemented at SDN Lhok Rukam. By fostering an environment that emphasizes both discipline and character, the school not only improves academic outcomes but also nurtures students who are socially responsible and morally upright (S. M. S. Akmaluddin, Rahmattullah, 2023).

#### 3. Overcoming Challenges

To address the challenges, the school has implemented several solutions, including:

- a. Strengthening communication with parents through workshops and counseling sessions to align expectations regarding discipline (Mutu et al., 2024).
- b. Seeking external funding and partnerships to enhance resources for extracurricular activities (M. Akmaluddin, Rahmattullah, 2022).
- c. Conducting regular teacher training to ensure consistent application of character education principles (Yanti, 2024).

These efforts align with the suggestions of Fullan (2011), who emphasizes that sustainable educational reform requires systemic approaches, including capacity building and stakeholder engagement.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the strategies implemented by the principal at SDN Lhok Rukam to improve education quality based on discipline and character have shown positive impacts on the quality of education (Afriani, 2024). Through strengthening discipline and character education, students have demonstrated significant development both academically and behaviorally (Sumarni et al., 2024). Despite the challenges in implementation, collaboration between the school and the community, along with the principal's commitment, has played a key role in creating a better educational environment (M. Akmaluddin, Rahmattullah, 2022).

This research contributes significantly to the development of models for character and discipline-based education that can be implemented in other schools in similar areas (Nastuti, 2024). Additionally, the findings from this study can serve as a foundation for the development of adaptive educational policies that are relevant to the needs of communities in regions with limited resources (Miswardi et al., 2024).

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